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ABSTRACT

To be responsible, educational administrator training programs must take the context of practice into account in program design and execution. Adaptation in content, instructional processes, and support systems are required. The University of New Mexico's Spanish Language Master's Program, which has graduated 127 students, provides a model for relevance in training program design. This program is designed to prepare educational administrators to work within an economy of scarcity where the national ethos is likely to be idiographic, conventionalist, and generalist. Because graduates will occupy senior positions in universities or ministries and professional mobility will be high, courses focus on issues germaine to centralized decision-making bodies, include observational field experiences in a variety of educational institutions, and are general in scope. Sufficient flexibility exists to permit minors. Adaptations in instructional processes must accommodate both faculty/student role reversal to allow display of student expertise and cultural demands for formalism/social distance between faculty and student. Extraordinary support systems are required to provide personal/logistical, bureaucratic/institutional, instructional, social/psychological, and continuing post-program professional services. Beyond faculty commitment and institutional support, changes in power relations are required if the prevailing homogeneity of contexts assumption is to be challenged successfully. (NEC)

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ADMINISTRATOR PREPARATION MODELS AND THE IMPACT OF THE PRACTICE CONTEXT

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Introduction

Criticism of programs in educational administration are neither infrequent nor unexpected.[1] Much of the criticism focuses upon "irrelevance", a perceived disjunction between what is taught in administrator preparation programs and what the context of administrative practice requires. Thus a strong case can be made for taking the context of practice into account in the design and execution of administrator preparation programs.

During the past 20 years the Department of Educational Administration at the University of New Mexico has been involved in a series of specialized training programs in addition to its base or regular programs. Among the former have been a variety of short term, non-degree bearing programs offered for Latin American participant groups, the Cooperative Higher Education Institute, the Managers of Educational Change Program, the Navajo Administrator Training Program, and, more recently, the Spanish Language Master's Program in Educational Administration and Supervision. Each of these programs has required a progressively more intense attention to the cultural context in which the administrative role is enacted, and has heightened the awareness of the potential disjunctions between the context of training and the context of practice. Thus each program has also progressively tested the limits of "standard models" of administrator training. The Spanish Language Master's Program will be used to illustrate and reify the concerns about context. In order to do so, three sets of data will be presented: First, a generalized picture of the cultural context of schooling in Latin America; second, a thumbnail sketch of the Spanish Language Master's Program which was designed with that context in mind; and third, a description of the programmatic adaptations made with respect to context, instructional processes, and support systems.

Cultural Context

The cultural context of schooling in Latin America may be described as essentially rural, under-developed, and economically depressed. People and nations tend to be fiercely nationalistic, but historically dominated economically, politically, and socially by foreign powers. Governance structures tend to be highly centralized, but marked by internal instability. Authority is more likely to be vested in individuals than in formal institutions, and personal loyalty and family networks are likely to be more influential in careers than formal credentials. Education is nominally free and universal, but few complete more than the fifth grade. Teacher training is at the Normal School level, and a cadre of highly trained professional school administrators is conspicuous by its absence. The various levels of education -- elementary, secondary, and higher -- compete with each other for scarce resources, and the taken-for-granted amenities of schooling -- transportation, facilities, library and A-V resources, textbooks, etc. -- are hard won luxuries. In sum, within an economy of scarcity, the national ethos is likely to be idiographic rather than nomothetic, conventionalist rather than positivist, and generalist rather than specialist. All of this runs counter to conventional administrator training programs in the United States.

The Spanish Language Master's Program

The Spanish Language Master's Program was designed to prepare educational administrators for the context just described. Originally the program was under the auspices of the Latin American Project in Education (LAPE) office, but is currently a fully incorporated program within the Department of Educational Administration. LAPE, however, continues to provide essential support services, including recruitment, translation, and the like. All students are fellowship

recipients from some source, -- national governments or international agencies (e.g., the Agency for International Development and the Organization of American States), and ordinarily spend a minimum of one calendar year on the UNM campus. All applicants must meet normal department and university requirements for entry into a graduate program with the exception of English language competency since all instruction and all instructional resources are in Spanish. Students admitted complete at a minimum a 36 hour course and are awarded the M.A. in special ceremonies upon program completion. To date 127 students have graduated from the program and have resumed their work in Latin America.

Adaptation in Program Content

Two related assumptions have guided adaptations in program content: (1) that graduates will occupy senior positions in universities or ministries, and (2) that professional mobility will be high. In light of the first assumption, courses tend to be selected which focus upon issues germane to centralized decision making bodies rather than those germane to organizational sub-units. Hence, for example, a course in finance supplants a course in school site management, and a course in planning, including consideration of environmental (political) variables, replaces a course in school law. (It should be noted in this regard that the absence of certification requirements is greatly advantageous in making course adjustments). In accord with this kind of adaptation, the unit of analysis tends to be the nation or the ministry rather than the school.

A second adaptation in program content is the inclusion of one or more "field experiences" in each students's program of studies. The intent of the field experience is to provide a vehicle by which students can observe at first hand a variety of educational institutions established in response to social needs. Since specialized programs are rare in Latin America despite equivalent or greater

needs , it seems reasonable to acquaint students with model bilingual, vocational, and special education programs. Follow-up seminars provide participants the opportunity to discuss applicability and adaptability of such programs in their own countries.

The practice context is taken into account in content adaptation in a third and perhaps more significant way. Much of what is taught in courses in educational administration in the United States is predicated upon acceptance of basic articles of faith -- the public availability of free public education, the private and public functions of education in a democracy, equity in the funding of education, both among districts and among elementary, secondary, and higher education. Such articles of faith are rarely discussed except in the context of funding formulas or school law. But in a national context where secondary education is seven times as costly as elementary and where higher education is financed at the expense of both elementary and secondary, issues of political philosophy lie at the very core of the curriculum and need to be addressed.[2]

Finally, a few comments on the mobility assumption. First, because the evidence supports this assumption, the program is designed to produce generalists rather than specialists. Thus a seminar in leadership rather than, say, a seminar in the principalship or the superintendency. Second, in its division between required and elective courses, sufficient flexibility exists to permit minors. While minors are potentially specializing in character, students perceive acquiring minors as expanding their job opportunities. In a climate of uncertainty this is not an unreasonable stance.

Adaptations in the Instructional Processes

Adaptations in the instructional processes are most clearly manifested in

adaptations in the instructor role as a response to variations in the student role. As a whole, students in the Spanish Language Masters Program are mature individuals with a wealth of administrative experience and immediate past occupants of responsible ministry or university positions. In short, in various aspects of the program, particularly with respect to the context specific applications of administrative knowledge and skills, students may be more expert than the instructors and expect the opportunity to display their expertise. In short, role reversal occurs with students as teachers and vice versa. Conversely and simultaneously, the Latin respect for authority demands formalism and social distance between faculty and students. Thus defining and establishing the properly productive balance between faculty and students is an enduring problem.

Other adaptations must be made as well. Given that any class may contain participants from historically antagonistic countries, the instructor role takes on overtones of the mediator/diplomat. Well-honed interpersonal skills are necessary for gaining access to and continued acceptance in multiple and frequently clashing constituencies. Similarly, one must be an applied anthropologist, historian and linguist in order to search out and understand multiple histories. Further, one must be prepared to engage in a substantial amount of materials preparation since the body of Spanish material in administration tends to be both limited and dated. Finally, one must be sensitive to the cultural nuances of behavior. What in the university culture, for example, might be considered gross violations of an anti-plagiarism norm, might, in another, be the expected manifestations of a friendship or clan network, or the simple acting out of the norm of cooperation.

Adaptations in Support Systems

Extraordinary support systems are required for the smooth operation of the Spanish Language Masters Program. Four types can be distinguished--personal/logistical, bureaucratic/institutional, instructional, and social/psychological. Personal/logistical support encompasses all those services required to transport and re-locate individuals and families from one country to another. This is a major undertaking and includes such functions as arranging transportation, providing and securing temporary and permanent housing, opening bank accounts, enrolling children in school, securing medical help, and the like. Bureaucratic/institutional support refers to such inter- and intra-institutional services related to visas and passports, negotiating fellowships and leaves of absence, complying with formal admissions requirements, reporting to funding agencies, seeking extensions, and the like. Engaging in these functions is frequently an excursion into foreign policy. Instructional support includes securing bi-lingual staff, identifying role models in the profession, translating recent articles and other course materials, ordering texts through Latin American publishers, and providing logistical support for field trips and other excursions. Finally, there is the requirement for social/psychological support. For the most part, almost all students suffer to some degree from the stresses of being "strangers in a strange land". Such stresses are magnified when families are left behind, home countries are engaged in civil strife, and careers jeopardized by absence. Certain conditions, however, have been found to be helpful in reducing such tensions. Among these are: (1) the ready availability of bilingual faculty and staff familiar with participants' problems and a willingness to listen; (2) establishing identifiable physical spaces on campus as program related, and decorating such spaces with Latin American artifacts; (3) providing referrals to professional sources of help when necessary; (4) maximizing ceremony, particular-

ly as related to significant events in the life of the program, e.g., graduation; (5) creating a personal and professional network among participants; (6) conducting a thorough orientation enhanced by the availability of a licensed pscyhologist; and (7) encouraging participants to participate fully in community life. In short, the effort is to create a warm, nurturant but not patronizing, environment.

There is, however, another aspect of support which deserves at least fleeting mention. It is that support which follows the student back to the work context, and in so doing functions somewhat as both an alumni association and a professional association. Both functions are performed through the convening of meetings of the graduates or larger groups such as the fledgling Inter-American Society for the Study of Educational Administration, and journals and newsletters like Educación (published by OAS) and the Boletín Informativo published and distributed to graduates by LAPE. In all cases the dual objectives are to form pro-professional networks and professionalize the practice of administration. The latter objective has been immeasuably aided by the establishment of a master's program in higher education teaching at the University of San Carlos, the national university of Guatemala.

To summarize, the thesis of this paper is that to be responsible, administrator training programs must take the context of practice into account in program design and execution. Adaptations in content, instructional processes, and support systems are required. But making such adaptations is not easy. Beyond faculty committment and institutional support, changes in power relations are required if the prevailing homogeneity of contexts assumption is to be challenged successfully. Entrenched beliefs and practices are rarely overcome easily.

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NOTES

1. On recent criticism, see, for example, Peterson, K. D. and Finn, C. E., Jr. (1985). Principals, superintendents, and the administrator's art. The Public Interest, 79 (Spring), 42-62; and Achilles, C. M. (1984). Forecast: Stormy Weather ahead in educational administration. Issues in Education, 2 (2), 127-135.

2. Data from Brodersohn, M. and Sanjurjo, E. (Eds.). (1978). Financiamiento de la educación en América Latina. Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica/Inter-America Development Bank, pp. 127-135.